

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
ACTION ITEM**

**SUBJECT:** George Mason University/Northern Virginia Community College Higher Education and Loudoun County Economic Development Initiative

**ELECTION DISTRICT:** County Wide

**CRITICAL ACTION DATE:** September 2, 2008

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Joint Board of Supervisors and School Board Committee is recommending that the Board of Supervisors participate in the funding of a feasibility study for the George Mason University/Northern Virginia Community College Higher Education and Loudoun County Economic Development Initiative, in an amount up to \$34,167, and that such study is to address a number of issues, including a thorough analysis of multiple models and site locations for how future George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College facilities can best serve Loudoun County's needs. The Joint Committee also is recommending that the Board of Supervisors be part of the Planning Group working with the consultant(s) conducting the feasibility study.

---

**BACKGROUND:**

Loudoun County and George Mason University are considering the viability of bringing a full-service campus to the county. Although this idea has been a topic of discussion over the last few years, it was never brought to fruition. Subsequently, Senator Mark Herring convened a meeting on April 11, 2008 with representatives from Loudoun County and George Mason University to discuss the development of a campus proposal. During its July 23<sup>rd</sup> strategic work session, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors included "working with institutions of higher learning (GMU/NVCC) to increase services/opportunities" as one of its top initiatives for increasing economic development in the county. Two days later, on July 25, 2008, the Executive Committee of the Loudoun County Economic Development Commission hosted a meeting with representatives from George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College to discuss their future plans, including the potential for establishing an enhanced higher education presence in Loudoun County via a George Mason University full-service campus, an additional Northern Virginia Community College campus, and/or some manner of shared facilities by these institutions. In addition to George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College, representatives from the Board of Supervisors, the Town of Leesburg and the Loudoun business community participated in the meeting.

By the conclusion of the July 25th meeting, it was apparent that there was a strong desire by all participants to move forward as soon as possible with a higher education and local economic

development initiative that would bring to Loudoun an enhanced public higher education presence in Loudoun County via stand alone or shared facilities for George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College. In order to do so, meeting participants were supportive of funding a feasibility study which would address a number of issues, including Loudoun's higher education needs, economic development opportunities, the collaborative opportunities between George Mason, Northern Virginia Community College and Loudoun County Public Schools, needed support by local and state government officials and the community, and possible campus models and site locations ("the Feasibility Study"). The consultant conducting the Feasibility Study would simultaneously work with a "Planning Group" comprised of representatives from George Mason University, Northern Virginia Community College, Loudoun County, the Town of Leesburg, the Loudoun County Public Schools, and the Loudoun business community. The Feasibility Study would include an opportunity for public comment as well. Over the last few weeks, the Planning Group has drafted a Scope of Work for the Feasibility Study, a copy of which is attached hereto as Attachment 1.

The Executive Committee of the Economic Development Commission is scheduled to meet on August 29, 2008 to review the Scope of Work. Comments from that meeting will be provided to Board members at their September 2nd Business Meeting.

## **DISCUSSION:**

An enhanced higher education presence in Loudoun County can bring significant benefits to the community via increased opportunities for economic development and post secondary education in Loudoun County. It is critical that the planning for enhanced public higher education in Loudoun be the result of a collaborative process where the county's needs are identified in the planning stage and addressed in the final recommended educational model(s) and site location(s). Loudoun County's participation in the funding of the Feasibility Study from the beginning of this process will ensure the county's opportunity to help lead this effort. Some of the benefits from a George Mason University/Northern Virginia Community College Higher Education and Loudoun County Economic Development Initiative are summarized below.

### Growing and Strengthening Loudoun's Business Community

It is well recognized that institutions of higher education can be critical assets to attracting more businesses to an area. As companies need more and more high-skilled workers as well as access to knowledge and research, their decisions on where to locate often includes consideration of access to higher education facilities. With the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors' recent adoption of a pro-active approach to economic development, an enhanced George Mason campus with an expanded Northern Virginia Community College presence in Loudoun County will present unique opportunities for partnerships with existing and future employers in the county. For example, an increased opportunity for customized training for current employees would help maintain the competitiveness of Loudoun's current workforce. In addition, an enhanced local higher education system also would address the forecasted labor market shortage as a result of rapidly changing demographics by matching degree programs and certifications with the needs of the business community. This type of collaborative effort

between the higher education and business communities would help supply the growing local workforce by aligning with local labor market needs, particularly in growing industry sectors and business clusters. Further, higher education institutions can act as resources for research and development, as well as provide human and capital resources to the business community.

### Serving Loudoun County Students

With college admissions becoming more and more competitive and costly, Loudoun County students would benefit from a more "affordable" opportunity to enroll in a local four year university such as George Mason, as a commuter or even possibly as an on-campus student. Students also would continue to have the opportunity to begin their post secondary education at Northern Virginia Community College and participate in full articulation pathways to one of George Mason's local four year degree programs. Northern Virginia Community College already is a pipeline for transfer students to George Mason, and a full service George Mason campus in Loudoun would further strengthen that articulation program. Since Northern Virginia Community College currently serves 22% of Loudoun's annual high school graduates, and it expects a 5 - 7% annual growth rate, Northern Virginia Community College will continue to play a critical role in educating our high school graduates through its articulation pathways as well as providing educational opportunities for high school career and technical education graduates. In addition to higher education opportunities for Loudoun students, there would be a qualitative benefit to Loudoun's K-12 program as well. Opportunities to expand already existing partnerships and form new ones with an in-town university and expanded community college presence would benefit not only the LCPS' curriculums, but they also would provide meaningful opportunities for teacher development.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

The estimated cost of preparing the Feasibility Study report is \$102,500. It is contemplated that each of the funding partners (GMU, NOVA and Loudoun/Leesburg/LCPS) will commit to provide one third of the cost of this study. Therefore, GMU and NOVA will each contribute \$34,167, with the remaining third to be shared by the county, the town and the Loudoun County Public Schools. If the county, the town and Loudoun County Public Schools each commit to funding the study, the county's financial contribution will be \$11,389; if the town or Loudoun County Public Schools fails to commit to funding, the county's contribution will be \$17,083.50. If neither the town nor the Loudoun County Public Schools commit to funding, the county's contribution will be \$34,167. The Town of Leesburg and the Loudoun County Public Schools will address funding the Feasibility Study at their Sept. 9th meetings.

There is no funding earmarked for the Feasibility Study in the FY 09 budget for the county government. The County Administrator has identified a portion of the General Fund Balance as a source of funding for this project.

**DRAFT MOTION(S):**

1) I move that the Board of Supervisors fund the Feasibility Study as described by the attached Scope of Work, Planning for Enhanced Public Higher Education in Loudoun: Building on the Mason-NOVA Partnership, in an amount up to \$34,167, to be allocated from the General Fund Balance. I further move that the Board of Supervisors (through representation by county staff) join the Planning Group as described herein.

OR

2) I move an alternate motion.

**CONTACT:** Susan Klimek Buckley, Supervisor

**STAFF CONTACT:** Kirby Bowers, County Administrator  
Linda Neri, Deputy County Administrator

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Scope of Work